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processor

Last modified: Sunday, September 01, 1996

Short for *microprocessor*
or CPU.

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microprocessor

Last modified: Wednesday, February 05, 2003

A silicon chip that contains a CPU. In the world of personal computers, the terms *microprocessor* and CPU are used interchangeably. At the heart of all personal computers and most workstations sits a microprocessor. Microprocessors also control the logic of almost all digital devices, from clock radios to fuel-injection systems for automobiles.

13:22

A PC infected with spyware can take 14 minutes to boot up.

Computer Associates·   ca.com/antispyware

Three basic characteristics differentiate microprocessors:

- **Instruction set**: The set of instructions that the microprocessor can execute.
- **bandwidth** : The number of bits processed in a single instruction.
- **clock speed** : Given in megahertz (MHz), the clock speed determines how many instructions per second the processor can execute.

In both cases, the higher the value, the more powerful the CPU. For example, a 32-bit microprocessor that runs at 50MHz is more powerful than a 16-bit microprocessor that runs at 25MHz.

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In addition to bandwidth and clock speed, microprocessors are classified as being either RISC (reduced instruction set computer) or CISC (complex instruction set computer).

See the Microprocessor Comparison Chart page in the Quick Reference section of Webopedia for a comparison of microprocessors.

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